

Paranoia, Truman Show Syndrome and the Sources of the Nile

Who picks your brain and why? Who stitches you up and uses you as a patsy?

For many years people have tried to “piggy back” their ideas and obsessions onto me.

I had three sisters. I haven't seen any of them for 40 years. I got so sick and tired of them attempting to manipulate me. All three of them were obsessed with television. The eldest one had a large family which she said was just like “The Waltons”. I mean she said that a lot. “Just like The Waltons, just like The Waltons....” Dear gods in heaven how I hated that. The second sister tried to emotionally blackmail me into having a TV set. She turned up at my door in 1983 and attempted to make me have a small black and white portable TV. She knew perfectly well that I didn't like television but she still tried to wheedle me into accepting the thing. She claimed that it isn't NORMAL to go off by myself and read books. She said that NORMAL people sit together as a family and watch television.

Apparently, reading books was a bad thing for some reason.

I could see the irony of BIG SISTER trying to force a TELESREEN onto me when we were only a few months away from 1984. She couldn't see that because she hadn't read Orwell (or anybody else).

The third, and younger than me, sister worked in a television shop and named her daughter after a character in a TV show called “Bewitched”.

A couple of years later, when I had completely burned my bridges from my square-eyed couch potato sisters, I had two friends who were both Doctor Who fans. They didn't know each other. One lived in Somerset and the other lived in London and they had never met. Nevertheless they were both doing the same thing: Trying to pressure me into being a Doctor Who fan and, by extension, becoming a television viewer. We had argument after argument after argument about it. One of them even tried to trick me into going to some sort of Doctor Who exposition with him by pretending that it was something else entirely. The other one persisted even into the 1990s, sending me Doctor Who VHS cassettes through the post even when I had nothing to watch them on.

In the mid-1980s I went to the Central School of Speech and Drama in Swiss Cottage, London on a one year course called “Sesame”. On that course we studied drama, movement and psychology. The other students on the course talked about television a lot and the Course Tutor, perceiving me to be a bit of an odd one out, kept telling me to “tune in with the group”. “Tune in with the group Pete!” she said, “Tune in with the group”. When they sent us on placements to work with groups of people who were suffering from various psychiatric

disorders we always found those groups clustered around a television set, chain smoking. It was the image of “normality” for them.

Is this really what society wants? Everyone forming little social groupings which sit around the TV watching the same things as each other while chain smoking or vaping to shorten their lifespans? Is that the best that society can come up with as a means of social control for the non-religious?

“Keep you doped with religion, sex and TV” sang John Lennon before some fanatic ended him.

Eventually, in the 1990s, I did get a TV set, although initially I was too busy to watch the damned thing very often. Many of the programmes being shown were repeats of the 1980s and 70s so suppose I hadn’t missed much.

From 1992 to 1995 I did a degree in Fine Art and part of this involved working with video. The first movie I made and exhibited as an installation piece was called “Static Jive” and, like Derek Jarman’s “Blue”, was actually an audio work with only one single image on the screen throughout. The image, in my case, was of a broken TV screen.

I was working very hard as an art student. I had very little money and had to work in two entirely separate part-time cleaning jobs in addition to studying art full-time and also taking part in various protest campaigns and hunt sabbing.

I was in my 40s and I was tired all the time. I used get up early, go to university, do a cleaning job in my lunch break, go back to university in the afternoon, go to a second cleaning job in the evening, then go back to my squalid bedsit room, eat something, switch on the TV, fall asleep in the chair, wake up at about four in the morning when some rubbish such as “racing from channel four” was on, switch off the TV, go to bed, get up early and do it all again. Saturdays I was sometimes hunt sabbing or sometimes getting signatures on petitions from a stall in Exeter High Street. In spite of permanent exhaustion I still managed to get a second class honours degree.

As the 20th Century ended I was getting older and watching TV more often. I saw the new version of Doctor Who when it arrived but I wasn’t very impressed with it. As a reader of speculative fiction from childhood onwards I despised the bloody writers who obviously didn’t understand the slightest thing about science and yet still pretended that the rubbish they churned out was somehow “science fiction”. They had someone setting fire to the Planet Earth’s atmosphere as a “solution” to a problem and somehow life on Earth was not adversely affected by the conflagration. They had the moon hatching out as an egg of some ridiculous space creature and somehow this didn’t cause tidal waves and earthquakes. They had the Doctor’s DNA being transformed into a “daughter” in about 2 minutes flat and she emerged able to speak English and function like an adult person. They had a diamond being worn away by someone hitting it with their hand over and over for a thousand years. I mean, if the audience doesn’t feel insulted by all of these utter rubbish stories then there is something deeply wrong with the British educational system.

I noticed that they dressed David Tennant in the same style of clothing which I always wore in the late 1970s and early 80s. My signature style of a pinstripe suit with vegetarian baseball boots. When I was working as a cleaner in Exeter college and my friend was a pretty young woman whose boyfriend had been in the army and who had then taken up teaching the BBC had the Doctor working as a school janitor while his friend's boyfriend was an ex-squaddie working as a teacher. It was around this time that I was getting twinges of Truman Show Syndrome, a form of paranoid ego aggrandisement where the sufferer believes that they are being monitored in some sort of experiment.

Avram Davidson (1923-1993) was a science fiction writer whose work I have admired. In 1961 he wrote a wonderful little story called "The Sources of the Nile" in which all fashion trends were started by the same people. If these people took up dancing the tango and wearing shorts the whole world would be doing it in the near future. They were somehow the sources of all trends.

Imagine if Avram Davidson's "Sources of the Nile" were real. Imagine if you were one of the sources and people found out about you. What would they do? How would people treat the knowledge that you were the source of world culture and fashion?

Wouldn't they attempt to influence you, persuade you, bully you into doing what THEY want the world to do.

If they wanted everyone to be brainwashed by the telly they would try to make YOU watch the telly. If they wanted mindless bloody Doctor Who to be the thing of things they would try to bully YOU into watching the bloody stupid programme.

You would be IT! The IT of ITs. Growing from the green waste matter of the society like Theodore Sturgeon's original muck monster.

I've been vegan since 1988 (apart from a temporary dalliance with free range eggs in the early 2000s) and was vegetarian before that. I've been a non-driving and pro-recycling environmentalist since the 1970s. I've never driven a car in my life. I've been a science fiction and comics geek since childhood. I'm delighted to now live in a world where the average person is environmentalist and familiar with both soya milk and the multiverse concept. In some ways I can feel as if the world were following in my footsteps. Sadly this illusion has its limitations. I've always been very pro European Union membership and, as we know, the UK went in the opposite direction.

People still try to piggy-back their particular things onto me even up to the present time. I'm not sure why they keep trying to stick it onto me. People try to cosy up to me and pretend as if they knew me and were my buddy, my mate, my pal. To some extent these tiresome pretences have made me the unsociable old bastard that I am. I continually feel it necessary to distance myself from the creeps and parasites who try to attach themselves to me. I have been, on several occasions, followed down the road by aggressive beggars who shout that I am "ignorant" because I won't talk to them.

People I've never met before in my life walk up to me and say that they have "heard" so-and-so and such-and-such thing about me. It's always some rubbish which isn't true at

all. Nevertheless the person informing me about it has apparently “heard” whatever the thing is and they seem convinced by the pseudo-logic of “why would they say it if it wasn’t true?”

Whoever “they” are is information which the informant cannot or will not share with me. Just the day before yesterday somebody opened my recycling box and stuck a couple of their things in there. One was a motor oil container and the other was packaging from some horrible big pharma product called “Demerol”. I didn’t know what that was so I googled the brand name and it turns out to be a powerful opioid drug used by addicts. Two weeks before that my recycling box had been invaded by somebody’s horrible cow’s milk container. Oil, drugs, cow’s milk? Is there a pattern? Should I stand guard over the recycling box until it gets collected? Or perhaps just give up and stop doing any recycling at all?